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Tense Alternation in Japanese Literature: Translating Free Indirect Discourse and Focalization in Kashimada Maki's *Meido meguri*

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Introduction

In Japanese literary narratives, it is not unusual to find a frequent pattern of alternation between the -TA and -(R)U verbal conjugations, commonly termed the past and non-past tenses respectively.¹ Nonetheless, in many texts, this alternation has seemingly little if no apparent relationship to the temporal properties that these labels suggest, thus leading to a longstanding debate as to the precise functions of these conjugations, with many previous studies approaching the issue from a primarily linguistic angle rather than a narratological one that recognizes the unique properties of literary texts.² Such an alternation can be found in Kashimada Maki's 鹿島田真希 (b. 1976) novella *Meido meguri* (冥土めぐり *Touring the Land of the Dead*, 2012), which employs this phenomenon as a crucial stylistic technique in the depiction of its protagonist Natsuko. This can be seen throughout the text, as in passage (1) below, reproduced along with an accompanying literalizing translation that attempts to highlight the phenomenon.

- (1) その時、ふと、奈津子は太一に手を引かれた⁽ⁱ⁾。
「なに？」
と、奈津子が尋ねる⁽ⁱⁱ⁾。
[...]
「海鮮丼食べたいな」
太一がいつものように無邪気に店の旗を指差す⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾。
奈津子はなにも言わずに店に入った^(iv)。[...]
店は地元で獲れた^(v)魚を出す^(vi)定食屋だった^(vii)。平日だ^(viii)というのに、
観光客でにぎわっている^(ix)。
太一は目を輝かせてメニューを見る^(x)。少々値は張る^(xi)が、妻は無理を



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している^(xii)、そんな風に太一が察する^(xiii)ことはなく^(xiv)。
奈津子は海鮮丼を注文した^(xv)。太一は、鉄火丼を注文した^(xvi)。³

- (2) At that moment, Taichi suddenly tugged at Natsuko’s hand.
“What is it?” Natsuko asks.
[...]
“I’d love a *kaisendon*.” Taichi points, as innocently as ever, to a flag
outside a nearby eatery.
Without saying anything, Natsuko entered the store. [...]
It was a set-meal restaurant, serving locally caught fish. It is a weekday,
but even so, the store is crowded with tourists.
Taichi reads the menu, his eyes shining. She is stretching their finances,
but Taichi doesn’t seem to realize that his wife is overdoing it.
Natsuko ordered a *kaisendon*. Taichi ordered a *tekkadon*.

Passage (1) here demonstrates a pattern of alternation between verbs in the -TA conjugation and those in the -(R)U conjugation. Verbs (ii), (iii), (vi), and (viii) through (xiv) are each given in the -(R)U form, while the remaining verbs are each given in the -TA form, alternating in both predicative and attributive positions. Leaving aside the two instances of dialogue and considering only the prose, it is clear that these verbal conjugations are not functioning here as typical past or non-past tense markers, as the events described must logically occur in sequence. For example, (x) through (xiv) must logically precede (xv) and (xvi), despite the verbs of the former being in the -(R)U form while those of the latter are in the -TA form, as Taichi’s perusal of the menu must occur prior to ordering. Moreover, as can be seen in the above literalizing translation, attempting to replicate this tense alternation in English results in a disordered and borderline ungrammatical rendition at odds with the accepted nature of this pattern in Japanese.

Passages such as the above show that the -TA and -(R)U conjugations do not necessarily function as simple past and non-past tense markers, and that to translate them as such is to produce an incoherent target text. For this reason, some scholars have commented that the usage of these conjugations may appear bewildering or even illogical to non-native speakers. Linguist Isshiki Masako, for instance, claims that rigid sequencing of tenses makes long discourses cumbersome and restrictive once the passage is established to refer to past events, and suggests that Japanese speakers have little sense of time.⁴ Literary critic Masao Miyoshi similarly argues that “Japanese has no clearly established grammatical

tense, and forms for past and present are often interchanged without creating any confusion for the reader.”⁵ Despite claims such as these, native and proficient speakers of Japanese have no difficulty distinguishing and talking about different phases of time; rather, this confusion arises when one attempts to directly correlate these conjugations to or otherwise interpret them on the basis of the tenses of unrelated languages such as English. Nonetheless, in interpreting Japanese literature, and when translating from Japanese to English, one must be able to understand and work to address the nature of the underlying grammatical and stylistic phenomenon seen here. In this article, I therefore attempt to elucidate the precise nature of tense alternation in Japanese narrative, considering Kashimada Maki’s *Meido Meguri* as a case study. While the stylistic technique of tense alternation is readily afforded by the grammar of the Japanese language and the norms of Japanese literature, and is a common feature in literary narratives, Kashimada employs it to extents and effects that arguably exceed those of many other contemporary writers, in a way that eludes straightforward adaptation into a language as grammatically distinct as English. As such, *Meido meguri* offers a particularly rich showcase of how precise use of this stylistic technique can be used to compelling effect in producing a striking character sketch. Through this analysis, I suggest that tense alternation plays a fundamental role in the construction of free-indirect discourse, serving to indicate a distinction between narration and focalization so as to highlight a focal character’s internal thoughts and perceptions, and to illustrate how they view the world around them.

The -(R)U and -TA Conjugations in Japanese

In non-specialist contexts, the -TA and -(R)U verbal conjugations are commonly labelled the past and non-past tenses respectively, as they often denote such temporal values in simple monoclausal sentences given in isolation, as illustrated below in (2) and (3).

- (2) 母に手紙を書いた。
I wrote a letter to my mother.
- (3) あの人はよくしゃべる。
S/he talks a lot.

In (2), the verb 書いた is in the -TA conjugation, and can only be interpreted as referring to an event that has already occurred in the past. In

(3), the verb しゃべる is in the -(R)U conjugation, and can only be interpreted as referring to a habitual action that does not belong exclusively in the past. However, most sentences do not occur in isolation, nor are verbs restricted to final predicative position. In such cases, the temporal referents of the -TA and -(R)U verbal conjugations may not correspond to these points of reference.

In attributive position, -TA can be used to refer to situations that may occur in the future, while -(R)U can be used to refer to those that have occurred in the past.

- (4) また奈良に来た時は紹介します。
I will introduce it to you when you come to Nara next.
- (5) 帰る時に少し憂鬱な気分になりました。
I felt a little gloomy when I went home.

In (4), 来た in the -TA conjugation refers to a hypothetical moment in the future. In (5), 帰る in the -(R)U conjugation refers to a definite moment in the past.

Moreover, in long discourses such as narratives, it is not uncommon to find the conjugations of verbs in sentence-final predicative position alternating in different sentences, as was the case in passage (1) above.

- (6) 太一は目を輝かせてメニューを見る。
Taichi's eyes shone as he read the menu.
- (7) 奈津子は海鮮丼を注文した。太一は、鉄火丼を注文した。
Natsuko ordered a *kaisendon*. Taichi ordered a *tekkadon*.

Here, (6) and (7) both refer to aspects of the same scene in the source text. Nonetheless, 見る, the sentence-final predicative verb in (6), is given in the -(R)U conjugation, while 注文した, the sentence-final predicative verb in both sentences in (7), is given in the -TA conjugation. Both examples describe components of the same sequence, and yet they employ different verbal tenses.

The above examples highlight two distinct phenomena which together have been the subject of considerable scholarly debate: tense alternation in non-predicative verbs (e. g., attributive verbs and verbs used with certain conjunctions), and tense alternation in sentence-final predicative verbs. These two phenomena have often been treated as one and the same, but it is important to distinguish them for reasons that shall become apparent shortly.

The -TA and -(R)U Conjugations as Relative Tenses

The debate surrounding the nature of the -(R)U and -TA verbal conjugations arises out of attempts to apply grammatical frameworks developed to explain features of unrelated languages to Japanese. Perhaps the most influential of these is Hans Reichenbach's model of tense, in which all tenses are inextricably related to the moment of speech.⁶ Such approaches, however, do not account for cases such as those that we have seen above. Bernard Comrie's alternative model provides a much fuller account of the depth of possibilities available in the languages of the world, broadly distinguishing between two essential forms: *absolute tense*, which is determined in relation to the moment of speech (and which subsumes Reichenbach's model), and *relative tense*, which is oriented to an external situation other than speech time.⁷ Scholars such as Akira Ota, Keiji Matsumoto, Toshiyuki Ogihara, and Kazuha Watanabe argue that Japanese features only the latter such system.⁸ Put simply, this proposal suggests that every tense is interpreted in relation to its structurally higher parent clause, and in the absence of any such parent clause (i.e. when the verb in question occurs as the sentence-final predicate verb), the time in question defaults to the present moment. Accordingly, -TA marks the *anterior tense*, signaling that the situation in question precedes the relevant reference time, while -(R)U marks the *non-anterior tense*, signaling that the situation in question does not precede the relevant reference time.

Using Comrie's system of annotation, these can be represented as follows (where *E* stands for event time, and *R* stands for reference time):

-TA: *E* before *R* (anterior tense)

-(R)U: *E* not-before *R* (non-anterior tense)

This mode of analysis correctly accounts for the possible use of both -TA and -(R)U in attributive clauses, while also explaining why simple monoclausal statements superficially resemble the absolute tenses of languages such as English. Applying this to our previous examples, the tenses in (2) and (3) are interpreted in relation to the present moment because the verbs in question, 書いた and しゃべる, predicate their respective sentences, and are not dependent on any structurally higher parent clause. However, in the cases of (4) and (5), the verbs which occur in attributive position are specified in relation not to the moment of speech, but to the reference time of their respective parent clauses. In (4), given that the addressee's presence is necessary for the introduction to take place, said addressee must first have arrived in Nara: the verb 来た is given in

the anterior tense as it must occur prior to 紹介します, which in turn is not anterior to the present moment. In (5), the speaker's sense of gloom is prompted not at having arrived home, but at departing to or having to depart to home from somewhere else: the completion of 帰る is not anterior to 憂鬱な気分になりました, which in turn is anterior to the present moment.

This relative tense approach thus accounts for tense alternation in non-predicative positions. What it does not do is explain tense alternation in sentence-final position, as in (1) and in (6) and (7). If, as this approach suggests, the tenses of predicating verbs should be interpreted in relation to the moment of speech, it would not be unreasonable to assume that all sentence-final verbs in the narrative should be given in the anterior -TA tense to indicate that the situation in question occurs prior to the implied moment of narration. This, however, is seldom the case. Instead, what we normally find is a complex pattern of alternation that continues throughout the entirety of the narrative.

Tense Alternation and Subjectivity

While it may be tempting to compare this phenomenon to the stylistic technique of the historical present in English works of literature, the functions of tense alternation in Japanese narratives differ from this in important ways. Most notably, use of the historical present in English texts is seldom as prevalent as tense alternation in Japanese narratives; once an English text switches to the historical present, it is likely to remain that way until the end of the passage, whereas tense alternation in Japanese texts is pervasive and continuous, often repeatedly switching back and forth between the two options within the same paragraph and scene.⁹ Secondly, the English historical present is commonly associated with first-person speaker-narrators, while the use of the non-anterior tense in predicative position in Japanese narratives has been described as representing either the “inner thoughts” or observations of third-person protagonists.¹⁰

Kunihiro Tetsuya, following Mikami Akira, argues that the -TA and -(R)U verbal conjugations in sentence-final predicative position are markers of objectivity and subjectivity respectively, giving the following examples:¹¹

- (8) この椅子は先刻からここにあった。¹²
 (9) この椅子は先刻からここにある。¹³

While both (8) and (9) above may be translated into English as “This chair has been here for a while,” they differ in one important respect. Kunihiro argues that the former, utilizing the -TA form in あった, is understood as an indirect report of a known fact, while the latter, utilizing the -(R)U form in ある, signals a direct expression of perception. This implies that the primary function of the two forms is thus not to distinguish different phases of time, but rather to demonstrate different manners of viewing the event in question.

Looking more specifically at tense alternation in third-person narrative, Akira Miura suggests that its effect in such contexts is to shift point-of-view, and cites passage (10) from Kawabata Yasunari’s *Yama no oto* (山の音 *The Sound of the Mountain*) to demonstrate his point.¹⁴

- (10) 蝉が飛びこんで来て、蚊帳の裾にとまった⁽ⁱ⁾。
 信吾はその蝉をつかんだ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾が、鳴かなかった⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾。
 「おしだ。」と信吾はつぶやいた^(iv)。ぎゃあつと言った^(v)蝉とはちが
 う^(vi)。¹⁵

A cicada flew in and landed⁽ⁱ⁾ on the bottom of the mosquito net.
 Shingo caught⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ it, but it did not make a sound⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾.
 “This one’s mute,” he muttered^(iv). It was different (*lit. differs*)^(vi)
 from the one that had sung^(v) so loudly.¹⁶

Miura argues that sentences (i) through to (iv) establish a series of events which have occurred in the past, while with sentence (vi) “the author is suddenly putting himself in the past (or to put it another way, in Shingo’s place).”¹⁷ He suggests that the use of -(R)U is necessary to convey the mind of the character of Shingo, and that were the -TA conjugation used instead, the sentence would convey the narrator’s mind. In this way, in third-person narratives such as (10), alternation between the -TA and -(R)U forms not only signals a shift in time-orientation, but also in person. In other words, the alternation between the two forms allows for a shift of focus between a narratorial perspective and that of the experiencing character.

Matsuo Soga suggests something similar when he argues that sentences given in the -TA form may alternatively be given in the -(R)U form for the sake of increasing the level of “vividness.”¹⁸ It is possible, he argues, for a narrative to employ nothing but the -TA form, in which case it will be perceived “in a matter-of-fact way,” or even to employ nothing

but the -(R)U form, in which case it will be perceived “as if the reader is experiencing the events himself.”¹⁹ Hiroko Cockerill similarly argues that use of the anterior tense in narrative has the effect of shifting the narrator into the background outside the story, while the use of the non-anterior tense renders the scene more vividly, suggesting “the presence of an on-the-scene commentator.”²⁰ However, while it may be generally possible to alternate between the two predicating forms, Hiroko Terakura shows that certain sentences featuring inherently subjective assertions resist such alternation, and associates sentences which must be predicated in the -(R)U form in order to “sit well in the context” with free indirect discourse.²¹ This association is an important one, and is reiterated by other scholars such as Barbara Mito Reed, Yukio Hirose, and Yoko Hasegawa.²² Taken with the above observations, we can see that sentences predicated in the -TA form present the events of the narrative as objective narratorial facts, while those predicated in the -(R)U imply a character as a subjective participant.

While the primary meanings of the anterior -TA and non-anterior -(R)U verbal conjugations are temporal, they have undergone a semantic extension in the context of third-person narrative: the -TA form indicates objectivity, distance, and the perspective of the narrator; while the -(R)U indicates subjectivity, psychological involvement, and the perspective of a focal character. As I shall now demonstrate, this alternation can more optimally be regarded as a distinction between nonfocalized narration and focalization, grounded in terms of a split deictic center.

Free Indirect Discourse and Focalization

Free indirect discourse is a narrative technique whereby the narrator takes on the speech of a character within the narrative, such that the notional sense of subjectivity represented in the text is not that of the narrator, but rather that of the character in question, with the text conveying not only their speech and thoughts, but also their perceptions, knowledge, and mental attitudes.²³ As such, the events of the narrative are focused through the mind of a focal character in a process of *focalization*. As a literary technique, this narrative style is characterized by particular configurations of the linguistic property of deixis, with the deictic center being partially displaced from a *speaker*, the “I” (whether explicit or implied) who narrates the narrative, toward a *self* who exists in the “present” moment described within it. I adopt here Ann Banfield’s terminology, noting that the concept has parallels in Lieven Vandelanotte’s “speaker” and

“cognizant,” Mieke Bal’s “focalizer” and “focalized,” and Gérard Genette’s division between the narrative entity “who speaks” and the one “who perceives.”²⁴ As I shall shortly demonstrate, this is what we observe above in (1), and in (6) and (7).

The term *deixis* refers to those expressions whose interpretation is relative to the extralinguistic context in which they occur. As such, deictic expressions necessarily imply an intrinsically egocentric focal point to which they are anchored, known as the *deictic center*, corresponding to a speaker who exists at a given place and time.²⁵ In this way, deixis has traditionally been divided into three main categories, as by Karl Bühler, Charles J. Fillmore, and Stephen R. Anderson and Edward L. Keenan: *person deixis* reflects or indicates the various participant roles in a given communicative situation, such as first, second, and third person; *spatial deixis* indicates locations relative to the discourse participants, as in proximal and distal demonstratives; and *temporal deixis* describes moments of time relative to the production of the speech act, as in verbal tense and temporal adverbs.²⁶

In third-person English-language narratives, free indirect discourse, and thus focalization, is typically characterized by a particular configuration of these deictic categories: person deixis and temporal deixis in the form of verbal tenses are typically allocated to the narrator behind the speech situation, while spatial deixis and temporal deixis in the form of temporal adverbs are typically allocated to the focal character existing in the course of events being represented.²⁷ In this way, deictic categories are systematically allocated to either the narrator or to the focal character, with no one feature being simultaneously co-referent to both. We can therefore describe this kind of situation as *deictic displacement* resulting in a *split deictic center*.

As we shall see shortly, focalization in third-person Japanese-language narratives is characterized by a slightly different configuration of a split deictic center. In such cases, person deixis is anchored to the narrator, while all other deictic categories, including spatial deixis and temporal deixis, are anchored to the focal character inside the events of the narrative. The key difference between the two languages is therefore the status of verbal temporal deixis: in English-language narratives, it remains anchored to the narrator, while in Japanese-language narratives, it shifts to the focal character. We saw above that only sentence-final predicating verbs in the -TA and -(R)U conjugations signal the relationship between a given event or action and the time of speech, with non-predicating verbs

in attributive or subordinate position indicating rather a temporal relationship with their respective structurally higher parent clauses. As such, for our purposes, only these such verbs in sentence-final predicative position are truly deictic; and indeed, it is only these verbs that alternate in tense to indicate focalization through a character.

While the process at work in Japanese is broadly the same as in English, this difference in the assignment of deictic categories has a significant implication for focalization: all complete, independent sentences in Japanese require a verb for predication, and all finite verbs must be stated in one or the other of the anterior or non-anterior tenses. This means that it is almost always possible in Japanese-language texts to ascertain whether or not any given sentence in a narrative is focalized, which in turn affords authors the ability to make use of this contrast for narrative effect. In English-language texts, on the other hand, only spatial deixis and adverbial temporal deixis typically shift to a character's deictic center to indicate focalization, and words belonging to these categories often do not occur in a given sentence. Consequently, it can often be difficult to unambiguously determine in English-language texts whether a given sentence is focalized to a character or whether it is a case of non-focalized narration. As such, while this pattern of tense alternation in Japanese effectively gives rise to two distinct narrative modes, one signaling exclusively the narrator, the other in which the narrator channels the mind of a focal character, in English-language narratives, this distinction is much more nebulous.²⁸ Nonetheless, the difference in the construction of focalization between Japanese and English language texts can be significant, and must be given careful consideration especially when translating literary texts from one language to the other.

Tense Alternation and Focalization in *Meido meguri*

Kashimada Maki's *Meido meguri* is a particularly revealing text when it comes to this stylistic technique of tense alternation. Revolving around its protagonist Natsuko, a woman deeply scarred by memories of psychological abuse at the hands of her mother and brother, the novella follows her both on a trip to a rest-and-recreation facility that she remembers as a formerly opulent hotel from her youth, and on a journey into her traumatic past in search of a sense of closure and resolution. As the work is fundamentally a character study of Natsuko, the use of focalization is frequent and highly prominent throughout the text, serving to highlight both her inner subjectivity and the ways in which she herself

sees the world.

In considering how tense alternation is manifested in the text, let us first return to (1), reproduced below as (11) along with a more naturally rendered English translation.

- (11) その時、ふと、奈津子は太一に手を引かれた⁽ⁱ⁾。
 「なに？」
 と、奈津子が尋ねる⁽ⁱⁱ⁾。
 [...]
 「海鮮丼食べたいな」
 太一がいつものように無邪気に店の旗を指差す⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾。
 奈津子はなにも言わずに店に入った^(iv)。 [...]
 店は地元で獲れた魚を出す定食屋だった^(v)。平日だというのに、観光客でにぎわっている^(vi)。
 太一は目を輝かせてメニューを見る^(vii)。少々値は張るが、妻は無理をしている、そんな風に太一が察することはない^(viii)。
 奈津子は海鮮丼を注文した^(ix)。太一は、鉄火丼を注文した^(x)。²⁹

At that moment, he gave her hand a sudden tug.
 “What is it?” she asked.
 [...]
 “Ah, what I wouldn’t do for a *kaisendon*,” he said, pointing, as innocently as ever, to a flag outside a nearby eatery.
 Without uttering so much as a word, Natsuko led him towards it. [...]
 It was a set-meal restaurant, serving all kinds of local fish. Even though it was a weekday, the place was crowded with tourists.
 Taichi’s eyes shone as he read the menu. It was a bit expensive, Natsuko thought, but her husband didn’t seem to have realized just how much she was stretching their finances.
 Natsuko ordered a *kaisendon*, and Taichi a *tekkadon*.³⁰

Sentences (ii), (iii), and (vi) through (viii) in the source text are predicated by verbs in the non-anterior -(R)U tense, and so temporal deixis is assigned to Natsuko in the present moment of the scene. Person deixis, however, remains anchored to the narrator, as is made clear in (ii) and (viii) where Natsuko is referred to in the third person. Here, the actions, and more notably, the perceptions described within the scene, are spoken by the narrator, but focalized through the lens of Natsuko’s mind. It is therefore these sentences that represent her own personal assessments of her situation, as in (vi) and (viii); actions that require her mental engagement, as in (ii); and her direct perceptions of the actions of others,

as in (iii) and (viii). The remaining sentences shift into the anterior -TA tense, and thus non-focalized narration: (i) pulls away from Natsuko's interiority to indicate the unexpected nature of Taichi tugging at her hand; while in (iv), (v), (ix), and (x), the narrator is simply describing the various actions and situations externally, causing the events of the narrative to move along more quickly toward the next scene.

The reader will note that the immediate distinction between focalized and non-focalized sentences has been rendered opaque in the above translation. As such, in terms of the perennial foreignization–domestication debate, this may seem at first to be a domesticating translation strategy, as it involves the adoption of a fluent style that aims to minimize the strangeness of the text for target-language readers.³¹ However, not to adopt such a strategy would be to disregard the semantic and affective connotations that the style possesses in the source language: faithfully rendering tense alternation in the target text would be to risk transforming an accepted and relatively conventional source-language narrative technique (albeit one used here to an arguably more meaningful effect than usual) into a highly marked experimental one. Such a target text would not only fail to instill in its readers a similar reaction as to that which the source text engenders in its own readers, it would risk prompting an altogether different response, as it may draw the reader's attention away from the character and the narrative, and focus it unfavorably rather on the grammar of the sentences. For this reason, the translation strategy employed above shares much in common with an observation by Bill Richardson, that “the deictic perspective which pervades the target-language text must be structured in such a way that it is deemed coherent by the target-language reader,” and that as such, “the translator has the task of ensuring that she or he avoids being influenced by the source text to the extent of adopting the pattern presented by it and employing such a pattern in the target language.”³² This strategy is adopted not to efface the source text, but rather to present a conventionalized stylistic technique in a conventional manner, and thereby to preserve a significant facet of interpretive meaning. As such, however, the immediate distinction between focalized and non-focalized sentences, a distinction that plays an important role in the reader's construction of the character's mind-style, must be addressed in other ways. One means by which this is attempted in (11) is with the help of explication; the attributive phrase “Natsuko thought” is inserted to highlight that this statement represents her thoughts and is not necessarily an objective statement of fact.

While passages such as (11) aptly demonstrate the interplay between narration and focalization, this is made more apparent still as the focal character's sense of subjectivity becomes more explicitly reflected, as in (12) below.

- (11) そして奈津子は、八年ぶりに旅行へ行くのだということを太一に告げたのだった⁽ⁱ⁾。

太一の反応は予想通りだった⁽ⁱⁱ⁾。こちらを向いてただ頷くと、また視線をテレビに移した⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾。だけど反対されないのであればどんな反応でも構わなかった^(iv)。どうせ太一にはこの旅の意味など一生わからないのだ^(v)から。とにかく、区の保養所が割引になって、破格の値段で行ける、だからお金のことは心配しなくてもいい、と説得した^(vi)。しかし誰を説得したというのだろう^(vii)? 太一は旅行の話など聞いていなかったかのように「今日のご飯なに?」と訊いた^(viii)。だからといって太一が、妻を飯炊き女と見なしているというわけではないし、二人は倦怠期を迎えているわけでもなかった^(ix)。ただ太一は女とか妻とか、そういう種類の人間の喜ばせ方を知らないのだ^(x)。³³

- (12) And so [Natsuko] told Taichi that they would be going on their first trip in eight years.

His response was just as she had expected. He glanced in her direction, and merely nodded, before returning his gaze to the TV. But so long as he didn't oppose her, she didn't really care how he reacted. He would never understand the significance of the trip. In any event, since the health retreat was being offered at a discount, they could go at an unprecedented price, so they wouldn't have to worry about the money, she told him. But who was she trying to convince? All he did, as if he hadn't been listening to her at all, was ask: "What's for dinner?" The question wasn't to mean that he regarded her as little more than a kitchen maid, and it wasn't as if they had reached a period of ennui in their marriage. It was simply that he had no idea how to please a woman, or a wife.³⁴

Passage (12) again features a high degree of alternation between sentence-final predicating verbs in the anterior and non-anterior tenses. Sentences (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), and (vi) feature the anterior tense, and so are nonfocalized, with the narrator describing Natsuko's actions externally. Sentence (v), predicated by the non-anterior copula だ, switches to focalization, with the use of the modal adverb どうせ further highlighting the shift into free indirect discourse. This sentence is not an objective statement of fact; rather, it is specifically Natsuko who believes that Taichi will never understand the true meaning of the trip (indeed, as the narrative

progresses, it becomes clear that many of Natsuko's assessments of her husband are incorrect). The situation is the same in sentence (vii), in which it is Natsuko who is asking herself the rhetorical question, and in sentence (x), in which it is again Natsuko who believes that Taichi doesn't know how to make her happy. Sentences (viii) and (ix) once more employ the anterior tense, with the narrator describing Taichi's response externally, and then clarifying that he means no ill-will by his actions, a statement that would be only conjecture if focalized through Natsuko.

Compared to (11), less explication is required in this case to highlight that certain sentences should be read as indicating Natsuko's thoughts. For example, it was noted above that it is specifically Natsuko who believes that Taichi will never understand the true meaning of the trip. It has already been established in the preceding sentence that we are dealing with Natsuko's own thoughts and perceptions, so there is no need to disambiguate her from the narrator again here. Moreover, in third-person narratives such as this, the narrator does not draw attention to their own presence in the text. As such, one would not expect the narrator to ask a rhetorical question, and so the target text reader is automatically prompted to view the translation of (viii) as focalized, indicating Natsuko's own assessment. In short, there is less need to add redundancy to this passage to convey the necessary effect.

We can see in the above passage that the use of the non-anterior -(R)U tense serves as an indicator of a change in point-of-view toward Natsuko's mental interiority. This function is further highlighted by the distribution of the anterior and non-anterior tenses in passages that shift into flashback, as occurs frequently throughout *Meido Meguri*. At such times, the two tenses often seem to be employed in an opposite manner to what might be expected given their canonical temporal values, with the anterior tense being used to indicate the time of the top-level story, and the non-anterior tense being used to indicate flashbacks that must have occurred at an earlier point in time. Such is the case in (13), in which, while eating lunch with her husband Taichi, Natsuko begins to relive an episode from her past.

- (13) ようやっと、海鮮丼と鉄火丼がくる⁽ⁱ⁾。奈津子は太一がマグロの切り身を口にして、ゆっくりと、目を閉じて食べる姿を眺めた⁽ⁱⁱ⁾。太一は脳の病のせい、実にゆっくり咀嚼するので、本当に味わっているように思える⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾。奈津子は母親と弟で行った高級イタリア料理店でのことを思い出す^(iv)。あれはまだ結婚前、遺族年金ぐらしの母親と、大学を卒業して就職したものの長続きせずふらふらしている弟と、パート働きの奈津

子の三人の金銭感覚が麻痺していた頃のことだ^(v)。カード払いで行った高級イタリア料理店で食べた真鯛のカルパッチョ。あれは偽物だと感じる^(vi)。緑色のデイルと小さなダイヤモンドみたいなキャビアがちりばめられたあの冷たいカルパッチョは、生きた魚をさばいた感じがしないし、味などわからなかった^(vii)。³⁵

At long last, the two rice bowls arrived. Natsuko watched as her husband, his eyes closed, slowly lifted the slices of tuna into his mouth. He chewed slowly, no doubt due to his neurological disorder, and so looked as if he were truly relishing them. Natsuko remembered when she had gone once to a luxury Italian restaurant with her mother and brother. Back then, she hadn't yet married Taichi, her mother was living off a widow's pension, and her brother, though he had just graduated from university and found a job, hadn't stuck to it, and spent his days wallowing in idleness. All three of them had no sense of thrift, no sense at all of the value of money. Red sea bream carpaccio paid for by credit card at a luxury Italian restaurant. It wasn't real, she thought. That cold carpaccio, studded with green dill and caviar like miniature diamonds, didn't look like a fish that had been alive. She couldn't pin down its taste.³⁶

In the first sentence of (13), the predicating verb is given in the non-anterior tense, suggesting Natsuko's scene-internal viewpoint. Sentence (ii), however, employs the anterior tense, suggesting instead the perspective of the narrator describing her actions externally. Sentence (iii) shifts back to use of the non-anterior tense, showing us Natsuko's speculation and mental observation. Sentence (iv) initiates the transition into flashback, a transition that we experience focalized through Natsuko's mind given that the predicating verb remains in the non-anterior tense. We then relive with her as she recalls the financial situation of her mother and brother (v), as she calls to mind the red sea bream carpaccio as if even now it were directly before her (vi). Sentence (vii) returns to using the anterior tense, reestablishing a sense of distance between the flashback and the narrative present and shifting back to narration. Tense alternation and focalization here therefore serve to show that Natsuko is reliving her memory of the past, experiencing it perhaps with greater vividness than she is experiencing her actual present moment with Taichi, and thus highlighting her mental preoccupation on the past trauma.

As tense alternation is not accepted in English in the same way as in Japanese, an alternative translation strategy can be observed in the above rendition. In English texts, the pluperfect tense is commonly used to

indicate events that take place prior to the main course of the narrative, as in flashbacks.³⁷ However, by intentionally avoiding the pluperfect tense here, and rendering the flashback in the same simple past tense as the framing narrative, the translation highlights that Natsuko's past is not distant, and retains a strong degree of psychological immediacy no less than her present moment. Explication has also been employed in the rendition of sentence (vi), with the addition of the attributive phrase "she thought" to highlight to the reader that they are viewing Natsuko's subjective impressions.

The above examples illustrate how the use of the non-anterior tense serves as an indicator of focalization through the protagonist Natsuko. It need not, however, be the only such indicator; indeed, being a component of a broader process of deictic displacement, several other deictic categories undergo a similar shift. Such is the case in (14), describing Natsuko and Taichi's arrival at the hotel.

- (14) バスは、山の急勾配を登り始めた⁽ⁱ⁾。小さな宿屋の間を抜け、山の中腹のホテル群を過ぎると、下に海岸が見える⁽ⁱⁱ⁾。この辺りだろうと奈津子は記憶していたが、バスは止まる気配もない⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾。左右に揺れるたび、夫婦も左右に揺れた^(iv)。やがて、山の頂のなにもないところへ運ばれて、一方通行のトンネルをくぐると、ホテルに到着したようだった^(v)。
バスを降りるとすぐに、ホテルの横にあったバラ園が閉園になっていることに気づいた^(vi)。母親の少女趣味を満足させていたピンク色の楽園は、今や枯れ草に覆われ、立ち入り禁止だ^(vii)。³⁸

The bus began to climb the steep mountain slope. After passing some cheap inns and a bunch of hotels, the coast came into view down below. It was around here, Natsuko remembered, but the bus showed no sign of stopping. Every time it swayed left and right, the couple too swayed from side to side. Finally, they reached a point at the top of the mountain where there wasn't anything to see at all, and went through a narrow one-way tunnel before at last arriving at the hotel.

As soon as they stepped off the bus, she noticed that the rose garden by the side of the hotel had closed. The pink paradise that her mother, with her girlish tastes, had loved so much was covered now in dead grasses, and closed to visitors.³⁹

Passage (14) begins with a nonfocalized sentence of narratorial description as the bus climbs the mountain, as indicated by the presence of the anterior tense in (i). This shifts to focalization in (ii) and (iii), as we see out the window with Natsuko, and have direct access to her thoughts.

There is a shift back to narration in (iv) and (v) as the narrator describes the swaying of the bus and its arrival at the hotel. Passage (vi) is again nonfocalized, and we do not see that the rose garden has closed through Natsuko's eyes; rather, the narrator is merely reporting her realization. Passage (vii) shifts back to focalization as we see Natsuko's thoughts in reaction to the sight. The use of the words *この* in (iii), and *今* in (vii), shows that not only verbal temporal deixis, but also spatial and adverbial temporal deixis too have shifted to Natsuko's position within the content of the text. As spatial and adverbial temporal deixis shifts to the character in English narratives too, this can be replicated in the target text in a comparable way to the Japanese, through the use of the words *here* and *now*. Moreover, as the presence of these deictic markers already suggests free indirect discourse, it further correctly implies that the remainder of this sentence is similarly focalized, and that the assessment of Natsuko's mother is accordingly Natsuko's.

A further example of how spatial deixis is anchored to Natsuko in the same way that verbal temporal deixis is can be found in (15), taking place later in the text as, upon entering the dressing room adjoining the hotel's dance salon, an episode from the past creeps up on Natsuko.

- (15) 奈津子は立ち上がると衝立てに近づいた⁽ⁱ⁾。その向こうには夥しい数のドレスがかけられている⁽ⁱⁱ⁾。ポスターを見ると、これを着てサロンでダンスができると書いてある⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾。しかしそこにも誰もいない^(iv)。写真を撮るスクリーンの前に立つ婦人は存在せず、鏡にはなにもうつされていない^(v)。ドレスだけが埃をかぶって、臭いさえ放っているようだ^(vi)。八ミリフィルムの中の祖母が着たドレスも、ここで借りたものなのだろう^(vii)か^(viii)。モノクロの映像の女たちのドレスだけが色を得て、芳香を漂わせ始める^(viii)。ドレスに付いているクリスタルが、一つ一つ、硬く、冷たく、輝きを取り戻す^(ix)。過去がまた、現実^(x)に忍び寄る^(x)。⁴⁰

She stood up and approached the partitioning screen. There were a tremendous number of dresses behind it. According to the sign, guests could borrow them to dance in the salon. But there was no one there. No woman standing in front of the screen for a photograph, nothing reflected in the mirror. Just the dresses, dusty, giving off some unpleasant odor. Could the dress that her mother had worn in the 8mm film have been borrowed from here? Only the dresses of the women in the monochrome film were filled with color. They began to waft with perfume, and the crystals attached to them began, one by one, firmly, coolly, to take back their radiance. The past, again, crept up on the present.⁴¹

The first sentence in (15), serving to establish the scene, is predicated by the verb 近づいた in the anterior tense. It is therefore not focalized, being merely stated by the narrator describing Natsuko's actions externally. The sentences that follow, however, are given in the non-anterior tense, and strongly suggest focalization through Natsuko. We as readers see with her as she lays eyes on the tremendous number of dresses (ii), as she glances at the sign (iii), and realizes that the salon is empty (iv). We read her thoughts as she reflects that no one is standing for a photograph (v), we access her perceptions when she notes the odor (vi), and we hear her wonder to herself whether her mother had worn these very dresses (vii). What follows delves even further into her mental interiority, as her thoughts begin to move away from the tangible reality that she faces: in her mind, only the dresses in her memories of the monochrome film (x) seem to be filled with color (viii), to waft with perfume (ix); not those physically before her. The continued use of the non-anterior tense in this passage is a major component of this effect, but it is supported by several expressions signaling spatial deixis. The Japanese demonstrative system features a three-way distinction between proximal, medial, and distal referents. Sentence (ii) here uses the medial adnominal demonstrative その to refer to a direction away from Natsuko, but not at the psychological remove that the distal あの would imply. In the same way, sentence (iv) refers to the salon with the medial locative adverb そこ to indicate that it is located at some distance from Natsuko, but still psychologically close. Conversely, sentence (iii) uses the proximal demonstrative pronoun これ to refer to the dresses near Natsuko, while sentence (vii) features the proximal locative adverb ここ to indicate her present physical location. Both the medial and proximal series of demonstratives can therefore be regarded as indicating Natsuko's focalized standpoint within the text. However, unlike Japanese, English features only a two-way demonstrative system, contrasting proximal and distal categories, and as such, the paradigm found in the source text will inevitably become more opaque. Because of this, focalization in the target text is implied more loosely than in the Japanese; as the narrator would not be expected to highlight their own presence in the text, the use of emotive descriptions and the rhetorical question more strongly imply Natsuko's focal standpoint within the narrative.

In each of the above passages, the alternation between sentence-final predicating verbs in the anterior and non-anterior tenses features as part of

a broader process of deictic displacement from the implied narrator to the focal character, serving not to indicate temporal sequence, but rather to establish a distinction between a narrative mode typified by distance, and another distinguished by mental immediacy. In this way, the use of the non-anterior tense in place of the expected anterior tense serves as the most consistently recurring indicator of free indirect discourse and of focalization through the protagonist Natsuko, and consequently allows comparatively unmediated access to her individual feelings, perceptions, and mental processes, thus presenting a rich character study of her as an individual. These examples demonstrate how tense alternation in Japanese-language narratives is not random, inconsistent, or a purely linguistic phenomenon, but rather part of a rich and meaningful broader stylistic narrative technique involving the displacement of the deictic center in order to represent the minds of focal characters. Moreover, we have also seen that tense alternation, when directly replicated in English, typically results in a discordant narrative style at odds with the accepted nature of this technique in Japanese. As such, the translation strategy evident in the above examples forgoes tense alternation when rendering the passages in question into English, but this is not to say that the effect is, or should be, completely lost. Recognizing that tense alternation serves as but one component of a wider paradigm of deictic displacement, as part of a deeper interplay between grammatical and linguistic systems, the translator can adopt creative decisions to explicate when necessary, to creatively manipulate the target language within the confines of its own accepted norms, or to draw on other deictic categories in order to highlight when individual character perceptions and thoughts should be distinguished from objective, narratorial statements.

Concluding Remarks

In the present paper I have proposed a solution to the tense–aspect debate that explains tense alternation in third-person Japanese-language narratives in terms of relative tenses for conjugable parts of speech in non-predicative positions, by which verbs in the -TA form indicate the anterior tense, while those in the -(R)U form indicate the non-anterior tense, and focalization for those in sentence-final predicative position, by which sentences marked by the -TA form signal the detached, objective standpoint of the narrator, while those marked by the -(R)U form signal the subjective standpoint of a focal character active in the narrative. I thus regard tense alternation as one component of a broader paradigm of free

indirect discourse, according to which the deictic center, which normatively resides with the narrator in full, is instead split between the narrator and a focal character within the text, with individual deictic categories being allocated to one or the other of these two entities. The typical distribution in third-person narratives such as Kashimada Maki's *Meido meguri* is to assign person deixis to the narrator, and temporal and spatial deixis to the focal character within the text. This stylistic technique in effect establishes an opposition between two narrative modes: one suggesting narrative distance (narration), and another suggesting personal immediacy (focalization).

While free indirect discourse and focalization are prominent features of English-language narratives also, such texts typically employ a different distribution of deictic categories, with person and verbal temporal deixis being locked to the narrator, with spatial and adverbial temporal deixis being freely displaced to the focal character. As the latter two categories are not obligatorily marked in every sentence in the same way that verbal temporal deixis is in Japanese, the opposition between the two distinct narrative modes is often rendered more nebulous in English translation. It is here where the findings presented in this paper suggest the greatest potential for further research and creative practice. Future studies may consider how the differing nature of focalization in Japanese- and English-language texts can affect readers' interpretations and understanding of narratives and the characters who inhabit them, and how it may be possible to recreate the effects and nuances of meaning made possible through the narration/focalization distinction when translating Japanese texts into languages that feature different narratological norms, such as English.

NOTES

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- ¹ This discussion of the -TA and -(R)U verbal conjugations should be taken to include the parallel -KATTA and -I adjectival conjugations, the DATTA and DA forms of the copula, and the similar forms of other parts of speech.
- ² For a comprehensive overview, see Yoko Hasegawa, "Tense–Aspect Controversy Revisited: The -Ta and -Ru Forms in Japanese," in *Pragmatics in*

- 1998: *Selected Papers from the 6th International Pragmatics Conference*, ed. Jef Verschueren (Antwerp: International Pragmatics Association, 1998), 225–40.
- ³ Maki Kashimada, *Meido meguri* (Tokyo: Kawade shobō shinsha, 2012), 19–20.
- ⁴ Masako Isshiki, “Nichi-Eigo tensu no hikaku nōto kara,” *Eigo shōnen: The Rising Generation* 111.6 (1965): 358–60.
- ⁵ Masao Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence: The Modern Japanese Novel* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1974), 24.
- ⁶ Hans Reichenbach, “The Tenses of Verbs,” in *The Language of Time: A Reader*, ed. Jan Christoph Meister and Wilhelm Schernus (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 71–78, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110227185.1>.
- ⁷ Bernard Comrie, *Tense*, Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics (Cambridge, U. K.: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- ⁸ Akira Ota, “Tense Correlations in English and Japanese,” in *Studies in Honor of Albert H. Marckwardt*, ed. James E. Alatis (Washington, D. C.: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 1972); Keiji Matsumoto, “A Study of Tense and Aspect in Japanese” (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1985); Toshiyuki Ogihara, “Tense and Aspect,” in *The Handbook of Japanese Linguistics*, ed. Natsuko Tsujimura (Oxford, U. K.: Blackwell, 1999), 326–48; Kazuha Watanabe, *Diachrony, Synchrony, and Typology of Tense and Aspect in Old Japanese* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2021).
- ⁹ Akira Miura, “The V-u Form vs. the V-Ta Form,” *Papers in Japanese Linguistics* 3 (1974): 98.
- ¹⁰ Matsuo Soga, *Tense and Aspect in Modern Colloquial Japanese* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983), 232–34.
- ¹¹ Tetsuya Kunihiro, *Kōzōteki imiron* (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1967); Akira Mikami, *Gendai gohō josetsu: Shintakusu no kokoromi* (Tokyo: Tōkō shoin, 1953).
- ¹² Kunihiro, *Kōzōteki imiron*, 72.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Miura, “The V-u Form vs. the V-Ta Form.”
- ¹⁵ Kawabata Yasunari, *Yama no oto* (Tokyo: Shinchō bunko, 2009), 9.
- ¹⁶ Miura, “The V-u Form vs. the V-Ta Form,” 98.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Soga, *Tense and Aspect in Modern Colloquial Japanese*, 219.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Hiroko Cockerill, *Style and Narrative in Translations: The Contribution of Futabatei Shimei* (London: Routledge, 2006), 58.

²¹ Hiroko Terakura, “Tense Variation in Japanese Narratives: Why Do Some Sentences Resist the RU/TA Alternation?” in *Papers from the Middlebury Conference on Japanese Linguistics and Japanese Language Teaching, Middlebury College, June 15-17, 1990* (Middlebury, Vermont: Middlebury College, 1990), 166.

²² Barbara Mito Reed, “Language, Narrative Structure, and the Shōsetsu,” (Ph. D. diss., Princeton University, 1985); Yukio Hirose, “Public and Private Self as Two Aspects of the Speaker: A Contrastive Study of Japanese and English,” *Journal of Pragmatics* 32.11 (October 2000): 1623–56, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(99\)00111-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(99)00111-3); Yoko Hasegawa, *The Routledge Course in Japanese Translation* (London: Routledge, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203804476>.

²³ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), 174.

²⁴ Ann Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2015); Lieven Vandelanotte, “Deixis and Grounding in Speech and Thought Representation,” *Journal of Pragmatics* 36.3 (March 2004): 489–520, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2003.10.003>; Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, trans. Christine Van Boheemen, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Genette, *Narrative Discourse*.

²⁵ Charles J. Fillmore, *Santa Cruz Lectures on Deixis* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Linguistics Club, 1971), 67.

²⁶ Karl Bühler, *Theory of Language: The Representational Function of Language* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011); Fillmore, *Santa Cruz Lectures on Deixis*; Stephen R. Anderson and Edward L. Keenan, “Deixis,” in *Language Typology and Syntactic Description: Volume 3, Grammatical Categories and the Lexicon*, ed. Timothy Shopen (Cambridge, U. K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 259–308.

²⁷ Vandelanotte, “Deixis and Grounding in Speech and Thought Representation.”

²⁸ It is likely for this reason that past authors working with European language have traditionally regarded free indirect discourse as merging the two entities into one voice. See, for instance, Roy Pascal, *The Dual Voice: Free Indirect Speech and Its Functioning in the Nineteenth-Century European Novel* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977).

- ²⁹ Kashimada, *Meido meguri*, 19–20.
- ³⁰ Maki Kashimada, *Touring the Land of the Dead*, trans. Haydn Trowell (New York: Europa Editions, 2021), 22.
- ³¹ While the ideas underlying the concepts of domestication and foreignization have been recognized since antiquity, these terms as such were first adopted by Venuti, who defines the former as “an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values,” generally through the adoption of translation strategies aiming to produce a transparent, fluent style to minimize the strangeness of the foreign text for target language readers, and describes the latter as “an ethnodeliant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text” exerted by deliberately breaking target language conventions to retain something of the foreignness of the original. See Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995), 20.
- ³² Bill Richardson, “Deictic Features and the Translator,” in *The Pragmatics of Translation*, ed. Leo Hickey (Clevedon, U. K.: Multilingual Matters, 1998), 125–133.
- ³³ Kashimada, *Meido meguri*, 13.
- ³⁴ Kashimada, *Touring the Land of the Dead*, 15.
- ³⁵ Kashimada, *Meido meguri*, 21.
- ³⁶ Kashimada, *Touring the Land of the Dead*, 23–24.
- ³⁷ Linda M. James, *How to Write and Sell Great Short Stories* (Winchester, U. K.: Compass, 2011), 24.
- ³⁸ Kashimada, *Meido meguri*, 28.
- ³⁹ Kashimada, *Touring the Land of the Dead*, 31.
- ⁴⁰ Kashimada, *Meido meguri*, 34.
- ⁴¹ Kashimada, *Touring the Land of the Dead*, 37.